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a better ideal takes its place. The moral man rejoices to render implicit obedience to this ideal, and he recognizes that in it are included all his relations to life.

We sadly realize from year to year and from generation to generation how imperfect have been our ideals; at the same time it probably means more for the race that the moral agent should form his own imperfect ideals with the help of the past, and with toil and pain and tears, than that he should accept ready-made an ethical system, no matter how exalted, and obey it slavishly and mechanically.

Our moral life is thus a tremendous venture of faith in the ultimate outcome of obedience to ideals, confessedly imperfect; an emphatic insistence on the solemn and final character of the categorical imperatives of even the ill-informed conscience of the individual.

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## THE TOLERATION OF ERROR.

Any one interested in watching the intellectual life of our day and in comparing it with that of the past, is likely to notice that a subtle but very real change has gradually taken place in the mental attitude of civilized and educated men toward such opinions and dogmas as they believe to be erroneous. This may in brief be said to consist in a readiness to give all ideas alike, good and bad, true and false, helpful and hurtful, as they may appear, a "fair chance," an opportunity to hold their own if they can in that struggle for existence which is as ceaseless among ideas as among animals and plants. Whether this broader toleration extended to error, real or supposed, is to be considered a wholesome sign of the times must depend on what such toleration means; if it is, as some earnest

people suppose, merely a by-product of materialism—if it is due to indifference to truth—it is certainly no subject for congratulation; but it is the purpose of the present paper to indicate that it is susceptible of a more satisfactory interpretation, and that, while perhaps not unaccompanied by dangers, it indicates a real advance toward a higher and more adequate conception of the intellectual and moral interests of our race.

That there has been such a change needs little proof. In all past ages that were marked by sincerity and zeal, the leaders of thought were ardent in the work of making converts to their views. In proportion to the strength and vividness of their convictions, was the keenness with which they hunted down and strove to exterminate root and branch the doctrine opposed to them. In the fight between dogmas no quarter was offered or expected. If Agag himself was spared,—and we know how often zeal against heresy led to the destruction of the heretic,—at least the ideas for which he fought and which lent strength to his arm must be hewn in pieces before the Lord. It was held to be self-evident that the lover of truth was utterly abhorrent of all opinions that he conceived to be erroneous. The Latitudinarian, the Mr. Facing-both-ways, might stop and hesitate, pointing out that as the shield had two sides one could not be sure at first sight whether it were all gold or not; but the straight-forward man having the courage of his convictions must stick to his party and offer no compromise to the enemy. Either this or that, either God or Baal, choose ye this day whom ye will serve. Hence all reformers had to be of the Luther or Loyola, rather than of the Erasmus or Montaigne, type of mind. To be intense was to be narrow, to see clearly the gaze must be kept fixed on a single point. But slowly and unconsciously yet with ever-increasing clearness, it has dawned upon the human mind that the connection between zeal for truth and intolerance of that which seemed to the thinker untrue, was not so close or so inevitable as had been assumed. In this case, as so frequently, an often repeated association between two ideas had come to be regarded as a rationally justifiable bond between them,—“constant conjunction,” in Hume’s phrase, being taken as a “necessary connection.” The earnest

man is apt to be narrow, but he is not forced to be so; and breadth of outlook is not incompatible with depth of thought. Moreover experience has shown how infinitely more useful are enthusiasm and openness of mind when conjoined than when separated. In the sphere of philosophy it is part of the debt which we owe to Hegel that by his strong and insistent protest against the finality of such judgments as rest on an "either—or," and by his thorough exposition of the nature of a truth as always transcending its direct dogmatic statement, we have learned to regard it as almost axiomatic in speculative thought that even the most self-evident or well-certified proposition implies within itself its "*Anders-Sein*,"—its negative and corrective, which must be evolved and apprehended if the full import of the proposition is to be rightly appreciated.

If we turn to the vast and widespread movements, social, economic and political, of the present day, we find a tendency to recognize as worthy of leadership, not those men whose circumstances, education or temperament lead them to an intense and exclusive partisanship, but rather those who to a vigor and steadfastness in the pursuit of their purposes add a breadth of view and something of a judicial grasp of mind. Not that the practical reformer can dispense with zeal and enthusiasm, without these the most philosophic temper will effect little; but for civilized communities the use of the fanatic is over. A "Mad Mullah" would gain no party among the progressive classes in Europe and America. The capacity to see that almost all the subjects which perplex and agitate modern society—the relations of labor and capital, monopolies of production, the limits of legislative control, the forms of political institutions, international rights and duties,—are most complex and many-sided, and that the problems they involve can seldom or never be settled by *a priori* methods, is recognized by most of us as an essential of true leadership. Enthusiasm and a readiness for self-sacrifice for a cause are as much needed now as ever, but we ask that the enthusiasm shall be clear-eyed, and that the cause shall make good its claim to reason as well as to sentiment.

It is however with regard to the more intimate beliefs and aspirations of the individual in their relation to his conduct, that I propose to consider the tendency referred to,—the tendency to set up a spiritual ideal which shall include with earnestness of purpose and uncompromising sincerity the most liberal tolerance not only for opponents but for the opinions and conceptions they represent. Of course it would be impossible to maintain that such an ideal is even now universally recognized in theory, and still less can we claim that it is generally realized. But that it exists to some extent and has a widening circle of influence can hardly be denied. The spirits that animated Milton's "Areopagitica" was exceptional in his day—he himself was not always under its control,—but its dicta are common-places and truisms now. The new idea, clad in unfamiliar garb, is not necessarily for us the suspect it would have been for our fathers. An example of this greater tolerance may be found in the way the ethical and religious heresies of Nietzsche have been treated by thoughtful men all over Europe. The storm of reprobation which but half a century ago greeted Darwin's writings, though these were purely scientific in their subject-matter, and though their language was studiously moderate wherever theological or moral susceptibilities might be affected, was far stronger than the opposition offered a generation later to the violent invective directed against theistic doctrine and Christian ethics by the latest and most brilliant of pessimists. It is perhaps, in part owing to the indirect influence of the work of Darwin, himself the most tolerant and liberal of men, that later innovators are treated with more generosity than he was. Certainly in the case of Nietzsche we find that many even of those who regard his theories as seriously dangerous for his immediate disciples, and as deficient in elements of permanent worth, yet willingly admit that the eagerness with which they have been welcomed and the readiness with which they have been assimilated show they must contain some relative and partial truth, and possess at least a temporary value, if only by way of a reaction against the specious shams and shadowy unrealities hidden under the mask of our conventional morality. Nietzsche's philosophy

as a whole may not be strong enough to stand the tests of criticism and experience, the charm of its clever paradoxes and the captivation of its daring originality may lead many minds away from sounder and saner teachings, yet its net results, if we consider it not in abstraction as though it were the only intellectual force in existence, but as a part of the whole stream of tendency of our day, may very well be for good rather than for evil. It is the consciousness of this possibility in all such cases that makes prudent men chary of boycotting any set of opinions, even when firmly convinced that they are erroneous, and, it may be, considered in themselves, obnoxious to morality. So inextricably interwoven are the outgrowths of the intellectual world, that wisdom requires us to let all new ideas have an opportunity of proving their worth, lest if we root out the tares we root out also the wheat with them.

Influenced, perhaps, to some extent by the increased interest in psychological and sociological analysis, but mainly by reason of the intense individualism which is such a marked characteristic of the spirit of our age, we have come to feel acutely the importance of the personal point of view. At the same time, conscious of the enormous and fast-increasing complexity of modern life, and of the boundless number of forces at work upon every civilized human being, we are learning to moderate and limit the intellectual claims and the spiritual duties of the individual. The whole in its full-orbed completeness is not to be apprehended by any single man, and he best succeeds in gaining some clear and intelligible view of it who keeps faithful to that standpoint which circumstances, temperament and training have given him. The poet sees reality in another form than does the man of science, and his vision becomes obscured and his perspective distorted if he attempts to rationalize the revelation of imaginative insight. The mind of mystical tendency has its own outlook upon things, and the mind of logical and formal habit must see them differently. The legitimate and wholesome modification of individual opinion in every case, must come not from each inquirer trying to adopt his neighbor's point of view, but from each keeping in mind that his neighbor has his own point of view, and that this fact

constitutes a part of the reality which both are striving to conceive adequately. We can thus see that the ideal catholicity which is to be aimed at is not that all shall come to think alike, nor yet that each mind shall be "broad" enough to entertain opinions that are really mutually contradictory, but rather that every man, while endeavoring to see clearly and to guard faithfully his own vision of truth, shall recognize that no exclusive inspiration is his, but that his fellow's intellectual and spiritual experience, be it what it may, has a proper place in the universe of things; and that, limitless as is reality, so are its aspects innumerable and infinitely various in their presentation to the minds of men.

It is especially in regard to religious dogma that this new toleration is most obviously extending its influence; and while it is in this sphere that it finds its fullest justification, yet it is here too that its ultimate results are most difficult to forecast. If we take America as typical in this instance, as in many others, of what is most characteristic in the modern spirit, we shall have little difficulty in seeing that the degree of importance attached to the holding and teaching of particular theological doctrines is very different now from what it was in even a comparatively recent past. I do not allude to a difference in the beliefs themselves, to the relaxing of Calvinism or to the spread of the extra-orthodox bodies; what concerns us here is that the majority of thoughtful and conscientious Americans, whatever their private beliefs may be, regard as of the very slightest importance the question whether a particular man holds a particular creed or not. Heresy-hunting is an out-of-fashion sport. It is only with extreme reluctance that ecclesiastical authorities interfere, even when the most heterodox opinions are uttered from the pulpit or the platform; while all that the layman asks of his spiritual pastor is that he shall have attached himself to some church, the standards of which are not in obvious and flagrant contradiction to his genuine convictions. The really important matter is felt to be the sincerity of the man himself, and his power to give moral uplifting and spiritual consolation to those for whom he labors; what is his doctrine is of trifling interest to the community compared with what his character

and his work are. Dogma is indeed little heard from the pulpits of American churches, and there is often an almost apologetic air about a preacher who ventures to give arguments for or against some theological tenet. He knows that his congregation probably care very little as to what views he holds or why he holds them,—they do care for any fresh light he can give them on the social or moral problems of every day life, but even in regard to these they may disagree with the opinions he utters without in the least deprecating or regretting the utterance. For neither preacher nor people look for unanimity of thought in regard to such things. We give, indeed, often a ready welcome to what opposes itself at first sight to the views we have hitherto held, just because the novelty is an attraction and serves as a mental stimulus, and we have come to concede, as though it were a right, to every new idea, however slender its real claim to consideration, the “liberty of the floor.”

If it is asked on what grounds this seeming indifference of serious minded people to the presentation and diffusion of their own religious beliefs can be defended, it may be answered that its justification rests on the existence of the feeling, more or less consciously recognized and avowed, that the conceptions a man forms in regard to things of the spirit are of a directly and intimately personal nature, and that therefore they cannot and ought not to be valued by others by reference to an impersonal and objective standard. Theology, if in any intelligible sense it can be called a science, is certainly at the furthest remove from the exact sciences. Neither Catholic nor Protestant, Unitarian nor Calvinist, Theist nor Pantheist, Supernaturalist nor Atheist, has ever been able to establish on rational grounds or by logical methods the certainty of the fundamental assumptions on which his faith or unfaith rests; though each can readily enough detect the inconclusiveness of the arguments for a rival creed. The spread of knowledge has made it almost impossible for any sensible man to claim that his own or his church’s apprehension of things human and divine is “the truth” for every one. However tenacious his hold on those salient conceptions which seem to him all-important, and which for him may be all-important, yet he has found by ex-



perience that his fellow-men have avenues of approach to the spiritual which are closed to him. This does not mean that truth is unattainable and the search for it a vain thing, but it does mean that it is no man's exclusive property, nor can one ever exhaust its concrete fullness of manifestation, since each man apprehends it only in its inevitable relation to the nature and development of his own soul.

From this admission of the subjective and individual point of view as determining the way in which the ultimate reality and man's connection with it are seen, it follows naturally and necessarily that the dogmas to which a person gives his assent get their value and significance mainly from their relation to himself,—they are the outcome of his character and react upon his character; necessarily, therefore, they will differ from those accepted by a man of another mental habit and disposition. Now no sensible man desires or expects that all human beings should be cast in the same mould; variety is essential to society, and it is to the tendency to vary that we look for the possibility of future progress. Monotony is the mark of the savage, differentiation comes with and from civilization. An unlikeness, then, in the way in which we envisage such conceptions as God, Nature, immortality, freedom, law, conscience, is in no way to be deprecated, it springs from and corresponds to the essential diversities of type which we find among men. The only legitimate convert I can make is he who finds in my doctrine the natural and appropriate sustenance for his inner life; if I succeed in winning over him to whom it is not suited, I only starve a soul. What we can rightly strive to do is to give the opportunity for a choice, and by education in its highest sense teach men to choose thoughtfully and with their eyes open, instead of accepting blindly whatever may be offered by tradition or authority. In short, what is of supreme importance is that a man's creed shall be verily and indeed his own,—not something accidentally or by the will of another imposed upon him from without, but the outcome of his thought, his life, his character,—the ripe fruit of his own growing. In past ages philosophers have wasted time and ingenuity in trying to prove that a belief in the existence of God was "necessary and universal"; this is

false, but we have come at last to see that, were it true, then from the very fact of its universality and necessity such a belief would not be of any religious significance. For religion, the conception of the innermost reality of things, with the emotional accompaniment and practical results of such conception, is and must ever be qualified and determined by the personality of the religious man. The Kingdom of God is within you, is the profound utterance of spiritual wisdom. The dicta of religious experience are not, like mathematical or logical deductions, the common property of all. It is because we are becoming conscious of this—that the concrete individuality of each man lies at the root and determines the growth of his philosophy of life,—that we tend to deprecate more and more strongly all subscription, actual or implied, to ready-made formulæ; and it is for the same reason that we are unwilling to outlaw opinions, even such as are in open opposition to those conceptions which we hold most firmly and prize most highly.

But the question may be raised, Is not such readiness to emphasize the subjective and personal element in doctrine fraught with danger to the cause of truth? Such an attitude, it may be said, implies the virtual acceptance of the statement of the Greek Sophists, that there is no truth other than individual opinion. And can we even vigorously and sincerely hold our own opinion unless we recognize the existence of some independent standard, some objective reality, standing wholly apart from individual predilections and unaffected by special points of view? Anarchy might be even more fatal than tyranny in the realm of ideas. The objection is certainly worthy of consideration, but the real danger is not of too much toleration but of a toleration wrongly motivated and based on an imperfect and inadequate understanding of our moral and intellectual needs. If we regard with complacency or indifference the views which we believe to be erroneous because we think it is of no consequence what a man thinks, we are ignoring some of the greatest forces at work upon the human soul, and overlooking one of the most significant symptoms of the state of the soul. It is impossible to doubt that a man is helped or hindered, raised or lowered, enlightened or blinded, by the conceptions he holds of

life, of society, of nature, of God, of the moral law ; these are to him of vital moment, since, in proportion to their strength and permanence, they help to determine his character and his conduct. But it is one thing to recognize the potent influence that ideas have, and another to desire or endeavor to determine for another what his ideas shall be. The proverb that "what is one man's meat is another man's poison" is true in this regard. Take for example such a doctrine as that of Calvinism : it has proved, as all admit, strong food and drink for the nourishment of upright, vigorous, virile characters ; on it have been reared some whom the world could have ill spared when the work of the warrior and the pioneer was to be done ; but how many sensitive, highly-strung natures has it brought to spiritual starvation and disease ! What was a logical and rational world-system to Calvin's mind was a hideous nightmare to Shelley's. How obviously absurd were the assertion that it had been of no consequence whether the great theologian had held the doctrine of predestination, or the great poet had maintained his faith in a limitless humanitarianism ! The only toleration which is psychologically and ethically justifiable is that which rests on the recognition on the one hand of the innumerable differences in human beings, involving corresponding innumerable needs and capacities, and on the other of the infinite complexity of the world of reality and the impossibility of its being ever fully compassed or completely analyzed by any finite understanding. To tolerate ideas on the supposition that an opinion, whatever its character, can be held without either good or evil resulting from it, is to found liberty of thought on a most untrustworthy basis. But impatience of, and hostility to, any view opposed to our own is not so much a tribute to the supreme claims of the truth as a practical assertion of our infallibility in comprehending or defining all that the truth includes.

The subject of the relativity of knowledge is too large to be more than alluded to here ; but it is certainly necessary to guard against the misconception that toleration for error logically implies a denial of the reality, permanence, and value of truth itself. Truth is the apprehension of reality, the grasp of the mind

upon fact. Those whose scepticism is so thorough that they can deny the existence of reality may refuse to believe in truth ; but they who regard reality as infinite must expect that it will take on the most varied forms and appear under the most unlike conditioning circumstances. We are not bound to regard each man's view of the real as equally clear, or his grasp of it as equally strong. We can see in the relative adequacy of his philosophy of life, as it appears to us, a sign of the degree of the individual's mental vigor and moral soundness. We may, and in proportion to the strength of our critical faculty we must, judge systems of theological or anti-theological thought according as they do or do not satisfy our minds as being logically and ethically adequate. It is almost a truism to assert that with each stage in the growth and opening out of the intelligence the old conceptions of truth are found to need revision and enlargement, but this is not to say that those old conceptions were wrong and useless ; they formed an early but perhaps a necessary step toward the farther goal. So when we meet in our fellow men with theological, speculative, or moral ideas, which from our point of view look like the rubbish and refuse of a creed outworn or the vagaries of a disorderly and uncontrolled imagination, we need not fear we are relapsing into indifference or cynical doubt because we allow free course to what for us is error. Darkness is only a less degree of light, and the darkness of ignorance will the sooner disappear if the windows of the human soul are opened wide to every quarter of the sky.

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